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Obama's Health Future

Rationing, and not only withholding care from the elderly.

President Obama's TV health-care forum on Wednesday evening was useful, because revealing. Namely, Mr. Obama shared more than he probably intended about the kind of rationing that his health plan will inevitably impose.

At one point in the town hall, broadcast from the East Room by ABC news, a woman named Jane Sturm told the story of her 105-year-old mother, who, at 100, was told by an arrhythmia specialist that she was too old for a pacemaker. She ended up getting a second option, and the operation, for which Ms. Sturm credits her survival.

"Look, the first thing for all of us to understand that is we actually have some -- some choices to make about how we want to deal with our own end-of-life care," Mr. Obama replied. After discussing ways "we as a culture and as a society [can start] to make better decisions within our own families and for ourselves," he continued that in general "at least we can let doctors know and your mom know that, you know what? Maybe this isn't going to help. Maybe you're better off not having the surgery, but taking the painkiller."

What Mr. Obama is describing is his preferred health-care future. If or when the Administration's speculative cost-cutting measures under universal health care fail to produce savings, government will start explicitly limiting patient access to treatments and services regarded as too expensive. Democrats deny this eventuality, but health planners will have no choice, given that the current entitlement system is already barreling toward insolvency without adding millions of new people to the federal balance sheet.

Earlier, a physician asked Mr. Obama if he would subject his own family to the restrictions of a national health plan, even if specialists recommended treatments that weren't covered. The President was noncommittal: "And you're absolutely right that, if it's my family member, if it's my wife, if it's my children, if it's my grandmother, I always want them to get the very best care." We suspect most Americans would agree.

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